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LETTER

From a GENTLEMAN to his FRIEND

Concerning the Second Edition of the

DECLARATION

AGAINST

Antinomian Errors, &c.

Lately publish'd by

Wm. Griffith,

Mathew Wood,

Step. Lobb,

} Richard Taylor,
} John Rabbitt.

He that is first in his own Cause (13th) in his
own Quarrel) seemeth just, but (or till) his
Neighbour cometh and searcheth him, Pro. 18. 17.

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LETTER

From a Gentleman in the City to
his Friend.

S I R,

SINCE you will not admit of my excuses,
I can no longer resist the importunity you
express, that I would give you my thoughts
about the present state of Affairs, amongst
the Ministers of the Congregational persuasion;
more especially of what relates to the *Declaration*
lately Published by some of them. You're not
insensible how dangerous a task it is to unravel
the mysteries of the *Leaders of the People*, without
drawing the Odium of a whole Party upon
the bold undertaker, tho' the charge be never so
just and Righteous: This is owing to a funda-
mental Maxim instill'd into us from our infancy,
*That to expose the Preachers is to ridicule and
banter Religion out of the World, to introduce
Atheism and all impiety*, as if the virtues, or de-
pravities of that sort of Men did add or diminish,
from the vital Power and Energy of true Reli-
gion, which stands upon so sure a Foundation,
*that even the Gates of Hell shall never prevail a-
gainst it*. But so far has this Poison diffus'd it

self into the hearts of most Men, that the discoveries God hath made unto us in his Word how he will be worshiped, and what he expects from us, are not fully believed, except they be confirm'd by those we commonly call *Divines*, whom to set in a clear light before the Generality of People, is to rob them of the better half of their worship; who thereupon are apt to cry out, with *Micah*, *ye have taken away my Gods which I made, and the Priest, and what have I more?* And for my part I must frankly own, that this Poison had so far infected me, that all the Antidotes I ever took could not effectually eradicate the malignity of it, 'till by continued observation I found our *Ecclesiastical Donns* so far from being elevated above those failings common to mankind, that in many of them those very corruptions discovered themselves more predominate than in others: But whether the station wherein they are plac'd magnifies every Peccadillo in them, or whether their degeneracy be really so great (with which subject I may possibly hereafter entertain you) is not at present my intention to enquire: But I shall proceed to lay before you my Thoughts upon a half sheet, a few Days since emitted into the World, and affix'd to the *Declaration* you wot of, by five Congregational Ministers, as they stile themselves: And the matters of fact I shall faithfully represent to you as they came to my knowledge, to the relation of which you'll the more readily give Credit, when you consider, I can't justly be suppos'd to be byas'd in my Judgment to this or the other Party, whether *Presbyterian* or *Independant*, having never actually joyned with either of them, and therefore am under no temptation

tation to espouse one cause more than another ; but as Friend to Truth, and in detestation of that gross *Legerdemain* lately impos'd upon the World, I shall give you a short Narrative of their Advertisement publish'd with the *Second Edition* (as they call it) of their *Declaration*, and then sum up the whole in a succinct description of what part each of the five Subscribers acted in it.

For their Advertisement then, you shall know that the first part of it runs in the following strain.

It having been reported and industriously spread abroad, that the Declaration against Antinomian Errors, &c. was not considered, and approved of by the Congregational Ministers in and about this City. (Which is in manifest contradiction to the title Page and Preface.)

I shall not examine the ingenious stile this passage is couch'd in, nor take notice of the Parenthesis, aptly plac'd, as they may think, after a full Period, the supposed Learning of the Amnuesis to that *Reverend Society* shrowding him from censure of incorrectness : But I shall lead you directly into the understanding of this intricate matter.

You must know, that some time since a party of the *Congregational Ministers* held a *Consistory* at the *Amsterdam Coffee-house*, and other places, to draw up something to satisfy the World that they did not any way warp towards a hateful business call'd *Antinomianism*, and having their fancies quickn'd by the name of the place they were in, after many debates, they pick'd up some Errors from *Amsterdam*, or hard by, held some hundred years ago, and strenuously confuted them

by Dr. Goodwyn, Dr. Owen, and the *Assemblies Catechism*, with the help of Dr. South. This their composition crept into the World in so clandestine a manner, that many who were adherers to them, and their interest, could scarcely be persuaded to believe they were the Authors of that *Elaborate* piece; which gave birth to an Anonymous Pamphlet, intitul'd *Considerations upon the Congregational Ministers Declaration*: this some conceive to have been wrote by a *Presbyterian*; therein he endeavours to demonstrate by many Arguments, that it was not probable the Congregational Ministers were the Authors of that *Declaration*, and in a severe passage towards the Conclusion, seems to throw it upon the Celebrated Lunatick, *Trepidantium Malleus*, who boasts that he has highly merited of the World by so happily exploding Mr. *Baxter's* Errors and his Followers, and who really engag'd in a work of the like design with this *Declaration* some Months ago. But whoever was the Author of that Pamphlet, 'tis certain it had this effect, that those *Reverend Sirs*, who before had foisted into the World that, suppos'd spurious, *Declaration*, being now toucht to the quick, do boldly own it to be the legitimate product of their strict scrutiny into the Records of the *Dead*, by prefixing five Names to it, *viz.*

Geo. Griffith,
Mat. Mead,
Steph. Lobb,
Richard Taylor,
John Nesbitt.

Now upon this goodly Proceeding of theirs we may justly make the following Reflexions.

I. Hereby

1. Hereby we see unto what miserable Subterfuges Men are forc'd to betake, to palliate that Pride and Arrogancy which their aspiring after a Power they had no right to, had involv'd them in. It is clear to every one who knows any thing of the Congregational Principles, that, without the consent of their Churches, the Ministers have no Authority to engage in such a Work, and in all Probability the thoughts of this made them ashamed at first to own it for theirs. But as one Error is introductive of another, so thro' a fatal Mistake (which is an evident Demonstration they were conscious they had transgressed, by publishing this *Declaration* upon their own Heads) they have egregiously expos'd one of the Brethren of the *Conscience*, tho' not of the number of the five Subscribers; who to palliate (according to Instruction no doubt) the Publication of their *First Edition*, without their Names, gave out that those Errors were of such Consequence, that except they had more fully weigh'd their Collection of Answers to them, their Design would have prov'd abortive: And they must then have inevitably expos'd that Learning and Zeal (poor and blind as it is) wherewith they have for some time amus'd ignorant, well dispos'd People. Add to this, another short Remark, which will yet expose their Combination somewhat more, They call it a *Second Edition*, whereas, in Truth, it is very much questioned, whether many of the first Impression found vent; and 'tis generally thought, that the Advertisement, to which these five Names are affix'd, is stich'd by the Bookseller to their *Declaration*; which, with a new Title Page, is all the Alteration it has undergone.

2. We cannot but note, that they have hereby oblig'd the World with a taste of that Learning, which they

(8)
they account sufficient for themselves, and their Churches too. For being thoroughly convinc'd of the Ignorance and Inability of their respective Flocks to assert their own Principles (as the last Subscriber of the Five, very sagaciously has asserted) they, like true Champions, by their single Prowess have defended that Cause which none oppos'd, and confuted those Errors which no body holds, or charges them with.

3. Hereby they demonstrate to the World, how happy the present Constitution of their Churches is; since the Pastors can so easily ravish from the People, that Authority, Order and Discipline, which all of them, when first they were called to their Charge, found them in, and place it *alone* in themselves; which makes me judge, without any breach of Charity, that they have found their *Lording* over God's Heritage so sweet, and so profitable, that they would not be very much averse, upon the first Overtures of a Treaty, to attempt to make *the two Sticks one again*: And then they may exercise *Despotick Power* without control, beating their People with a heavy Hand.

But 'tis high time to come to the other part of their Advertisement, which shuts up in these goodly Phrases.

We, whose Names are hereunto subscribed, to the end the truth of Matter of Fact may appear, to the Conviction of every Reader, do declare, that (excepting two or three Ministers, who go under the same Denomination with us, to whom we thought not fit to communicate the said Declaration) all the Pastors of Congregational Churches, in and about this City, did consider, and unanimously express their Approbation of it.

And

And here, Sir, for brevity sake, I shall slightly pass over the awkward Style, this Sentence, (as well as the former) is express'd in. Have these great *would-be-Representatives of all the Congregational Churches in and about London*, with all their *Academick Literature*, attain'd to no more Judgment in their Mother Tongue, than scarce to be able to write true English? This indeed would be a diverting Subject to paraphrase upon, had I not matters of greater Moment to communicate to you, which will expose their *Honesty* somewhat more than their harsh English does their *Accuracy*. I will not, in what I shall say, take the method most of them do in their Pulpits, when they either force a Text to speak what it never intended, by their impertinent Glosses and Distinctions, or constrain it to go with them much longer than the Subject will bear; but I will give you, in short, my Division of the above quoted Advertisement, according to the Genuine Interpretation of the Words, which will unfold to us, what Doctrine is contain'd in them.

Then let us see how *Magisterially* these *Donns* open themselves.

We, whose Names are hereunto subscribed, to the end the Truth of matter of Fact may appear, to the Conviction of every Reader, do declare, &c.

It will not be impertinent to spend a few thoughts upon the Consideration of who these *We* are, that so presumptuously take upon them, to be universal Dictators; and from the vain supposition of their own Merit and Renown, to convince every Reader of the Truth of matter of Fact. Little Scrutiny made into the Merit of these *Rabbies*, will easily shew how much Credit we ought to give to what they assert, and what Influence it will have upon all Men of Sense.

The

The *Two* first Subscribers then, as we find them rank'd in order, are G. G. and *Mr. M.* whom I put together, not for any Resemblance they bear to each other, (for they are in some Respects as opposite as the two Poles) but because the *first* of them was, by a piece of Policy natural (to the *second*) decoyed to affix his Name to this Narrative, tho' he has since confess'd he did not understand the Intreague, and therefore I shall have nothing more to say of him: And the rather, because I'm credibly informed Mr. *M.* gave Directions, that unless Mr. G. sign'd the Paper first, his Hand should be blotted out; by which Stratagem, the good old Gentleman was ensnared, and the odium of his being found in such Company falls intirely upon his Betrayer; whose design herein I shall not pretend to unriddle, but leave it to be guess'd by you, and others, who have a clear insight into *this Man of Design*: only I must add, that I'm apprehensive his engaging to support himself and others, in Practices no way warrantable, will revive a Report which has been whisper'd about the Town of a certain *House and Garden* surreptitiously obtain'd from the true Proprietors.

Step. Lobb, Richard Taylor, and John Nesbit, bring up the Rear, and are the Persons whom I shall next entertain you with. Mr. T. I must in Justice defend from Censure, and acquit him from any sinister Dealings in this Affair, he being probably influenc'd by the Perswasions of Crafty Men, to whose Wiles the *Easiness* of his Temper leaves him expos'd; to his own great Disadvantage, and the Encouragement of their Insults.

Mr. L. you have heard much of in the last Reign, and not a little in this, tho' upon other Accounts. Then a Politian and a mighty Courtier, being a *Secretarius*

eritioribus to the late Tyrant: Now a rough and surly Divine, fighting his betters with his Pen; the common Scribler of what the Synod, meeting at *Pinners Hall*, alias *Amsterdam Coffee-house*, alias a *House in Moor-Fields*, please to employ him in: One while drawing his Dagger in secret, another while fighting the whole Synagogue at *St. Hellen's* with his Brandish'd Sword in publick. This Man of Contention, with his Friend Mr. *R.* were the great Promoters and Inditers of this Pamphlet, these two are intimately acquainted with all the steps relating to this quarrellsome *Declaration*. This poor Wretch Mr. *R.* is least of all to be excus'd, for that he discovers his want of Common Civility, which should teach him to be thankful to a Nation, that has put Money in his Pocket, and set the *Beggar* on Horse-back, who now in requital would ride over the Necks of his Benefactors; but possibly he may have found some Eucouragement for what he has done, in one of the *Fathers*, which he delights so much to quote, tho' with as little Pertinency as ever was sung the Ballad of *Chevy Chase*.

But I shall not spend my time in discovering that to you, concerning the *two* last mention'd, which you are no Stranger to; since the Spirit with which they were acted, will be best seen, when you understand the Methods they took, to perswade the World, that the publishing their *Declaration* was by the unanimous Consent of all the *Congregational* Ministers in and about this City. I will not question but the *Conclave* at *Pinners Hall* had sounded the Minds of their Brethren of the same *Denomination*, as they call it, with themselves, how far they would join with them in the Publication of their elaborate Piece; what Resentment the Majority had of it shall not now be told, tho' 'tis reported Dr.

Chauncy

Chauncy, Mr. Nels, Dr. Singleton, Mr. Short, Mr. Harris, Mr. Meidell, &c. car'd not to intermeddle in a Case that concern'd them not. This *Last*, was formerly a *Lutheran*, but some Years agoe brought over to the knowledge of the Truth, and is now Pastor to a *Congregational Church*, his Assent therefore they most *earnestly* desir'd, he being a faithful Confessor of Jesus Christ, and a great Sufferer for him; to obtain which, Mr. *L.* the *Scribe*, by order of Mr. *D.* the *Dictator*, writes him a Letter, which whether more full of Pride, or Ignorance, is difficult to define, wherein he tells him how *Harmonious* the Ministers all were to usher the second Edition of their *Declaration* into the World, with an Attestation to it under their hands, that there was but *One* more besides himself, of whose Consent they at all doubted, and that *One* had been spoke to, and therefore in *trust*, (as he says) requested him not to obstruct so good a Work, lest they should be oblig'd to let the World know, by exposing Mr. *Meidell's* Name in Print, that he was the only Man amongst them, who refus'd to join with them.

But perhaps you are as tyred as I am, in tracing the hidden By-ways of these assuming *Ἀλλοτεχνισκοί*, I shall therefore sum up all I am minded at this time to communicate, in a few *Queries*, which I leave to your serious Consideration.

Query, 1. Whether by publishing, a shameless half-side, to vindicate the Reputation of their former *title Page and Preface*, which, they say, met with a *manifest Contradiction*; these men do not at the same time discover an overweening conceit of their own *title Page and Preface*, and a measure of Insolence beyond what is common, when they take it in such Dudgeon, that the Authority

thority of a nameless *title Page and Preface* is call'd into Question?

Que. 2. Whether these Men by insinuating, that all to whom they thought fit to communicate their Declaration approv'd of it, become not Guilty at least of a very gross fallacy? since Mr. Meidell, to whom they did think fit to communicate it (if S. L —, and J. N —, may be credited) openly declared his dislike of it to them at *Pinner's-Hall*. Surely such *fly and untrue Insinuations* ill become Ministers of Christ, who should renounce all hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, &c.

Que. 3. Whether by saying, that their Declaration was approved by all the Congregational Ministers in and about London, but by two or three, to whom they thought not fit to communicate it, these Men do not manifestly contradict what S. L. wrote Mr. C. M. when he tells him that all had approved of it but One, and that One had been spake to about it. How these things can hang together they should best tell, but 'till I better understand their minds in this matter, I must apply our old Proverb to them. *Liars need good Memories.*

Que. 4. Whether S. L. when he wrote to Mr. C. M. and assur'd him that what he did communicate to him was *in trust* (employing his being intrusted by all the Ministers) when indeed but one or two could be found to have set him on work, did therein act the part of a *trusty Scribe to his Masters all*, or like an upright Christian, and faithful Minister, fit to be put in trust with the Gospel? This Query I leave with the Conscience of that busy *Emperick*.

Que. 5.

Que. 5. Whether these Men have not evidently run beyond the tedder of *Independent* Principles, in publishing this *Declaration* without the Knowledge of their respective Churches, and in unwarrantably concerning themselves with Pastors of other Churches? But alas! it is to be feared, many that go under the name of *Independents*, affect and exercise as much Tyranny and Usurpation, over their own Churches and fellow Servants, as any of other denominations, that pretend to no such purity; Witness their counterfeited Agreement, first clandestinely patcht up by *Clubbs* of Preachers, without the Knowledge of their Churches, and afterward as arbitrarily imposed upon them.

Que. 6. Whether, by mustering up a Cargo of *Antinomian* Errors, espous'd by no Party of Men, or single Preacher in *England* at this day, these Men have discover'd, most of a *vain Itch of Pride* to shew their reading, or of an *angry humour* of contention, to be quarrelling, tho' they know not at what, or of a *weak air of impertinence*, to bring somewhat on the Stage, nothing to the purpose, or of a *malicious Design* against Souls, to infect our air with *some German Antinomianism*, which they have rak'd out of the Grave of Oblivion, where they have lain now this hundred years, (as a Poet of their own said) and against the venom of which their poor Antidotes, scrap'd from Dr. &c. are much too weak.

Que. 7. Whether the insolent Methods these Preachers have taken to terrify men more conscientious than themselves, into a compliance with their base proceedings, do not discover them to be acted rather by the Spirit of *Belial* than of *Jesus*? Certainly it is not according to Christ's rule, to
Stigma-

Stigmatize others with the Title of *Antinomians*, &c. that cannot run our length, nor does it favor of true Christian humility for any to be perking above their Brethren with such a Phrase of contempt, as *We thought them not fit*. It is to be feared, these Men that think others *not fit* for their notice, in a way of respect, would think them *very fit* to be degraded, and deliver'd over to the Secular Power, why else should one of their number say, *we want a little more of the Magistrate on our side*. And what other meaning can be given of that passage, wherein they tell us, they judge themselves oblig'd, to bear with and exercise compassion and tenderness to their fellow Servants, chiefly because our Governors have by a Law tollerated us, and partly because the *Seamy Confession* hath taught them so to do. But for any Scripture or Grace produc'd by them for Lenity, *Quere*, Where it is?

Que. 8. Lastly, Whether upon the whole (to set the Saddle upon the right Horse) this Stratagem was not contrived, and promoted principally by one or two wily Men, that stand compact of *Demy Arminianism* in Principle, and *true Antinomianism* and *Intrusion* in Practice, in order to the raising a Dust of forg'd *Antinomianism* and *Intrusion* on others, so to hinder the pursuit of themselves, for their Scandalous Lives, Ignorance of the Gospel, Invasions, &c. And here, Sir, you must needs take notice how craftily they labour, to bring into black Suspicion, by base Innuendoes, the Persons and Ministry of such whom they most dread, treating them in Print, as the *Chieftain* at *Stepney*, formerly serv'd good old Mr. *Lawrence* in the Pulpit; endeavouring to load them with Calumnies sufficient, that some may stick upon

upon those and themselves may be accounted
Innocent.

A true Resolution of this Query, would
 at once to clear up the Reputation of several
 in all appearance were decoy'd into this Subtilty
 on, by the Craft of others, and that followed the
 Sheep, as the innocent Men did *Abolom* in his
Simplicity, not knowing any thing; and at the
 same time hereby we should see a little of that
 Guilt that lyes on some Men's Consciences, who
 they would be thought Reverend Men, are never
 tired of having themselves laid open; But let us
 consider that the Secrets of their Hearts will
 Day be discovered, then it will be known with what
 Spirit and Arms this scandalous Pamphlet was pu-
 blished. In the mean time, I profess to you, Sir
 (and you that know my Disposition, will believe
 me, whatever others think) that nothing but the
 highest concern for *abused Truth*, would have drawn
 me to say all this, and thus to have exposed Men
 whom, but for the undeceiving of the World,
 would rather have been unconcern'd with, as the
 knowing he that touches upon the fairness of a
Priest, is like to have the barking of all the Dogs
 in the Parish. But I must be of the same mind
 with *Luther*, quoted in their Preface, To the
Truth to be of so inestimable a Value, that it
 for Heaven and Earth be blended together in Con-
 sum, than that the least Dust thereof should per-

FINIS